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Date: June 23, 2004

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State's Average Annual Pay Rises Slightly Minimum Unemployment Benefits to Increase

OLYMPIA – The average annual wage in Washington state grew 2.3 percent last year to \$38,794, according to information released today by the Washington State Employment Security Department. On a weekly basis, the state's average was \$746 in 2003.

The average wage is used to compute weekly unemployment insurance benefits for jobless workers. The minimum weekly unemployment benefit amount, 15 percent of the weekly wage, will increase from \$109 to \$111 starting July 1.

Because the maximum weekly benefit has been capped by the Legislature, it will remain at \$496.

During 2003, the Employment Security Department paid benefits to 387,213 claimants.



Jobless workers were paid \$1.4 billion in regular unemployment benefits. In addition, Washington claimants received \$537 million in federally funded extended benefits and \$129 million under a separate state-federal extended benefits program. The average weekly payment was \$312.

The \$38,794 average wage used to calculate unemployment benefits does not include federal civilian workers and some other employees. When all workers are counted for, the average wage was \$39,021 in 2003.